The LOST SWORD OF SHAMYL

LEWIS STANTON PALEN

Author of 'The White Devil's Mate'

With illustrations by
Prince Serge Cantacuzene-Speransky

$2.50

THE LOST SWORD OF SHAMYL

By Lewis Stanton Palen

MR. PALEN, the author of 'The White Devil's Mate' and other stories of eastern Russia, has gathered up in this book some fascinating and unusually amusing scenes and episodes of the early life of the White Devil himself.

The story, which turns upon the strange history of the Lost Sword of Shamyl, so mysteriously involved in the fortunes of the noble house to which the White Devil belongs, is notable for its exciting accounts of hunting and adventure in eastern Russia.

Illustrated by Prince Serge Cantacuzene-Speransky, it makes an unusual volume that will delight the lover of sport, of romance, and of adventure.

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THE LOST SWORD OF SHAMYL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE WHITE DEVIL OF THE BLACK SEA.

Second Edition. Crown 8vo.

THE BODLEY HEAD

MIKHAL ESCAPING WITH THE SWORD

THE LOST SWORD OF SHAMYL

BY LEWIS STANTON PALEN

COLLABORATOR WITH
DR. FERDINAND OSSENDOWSKI
IN "BEASTS, MEN AND GODS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
PRINCE SERGE CANTACUZENE-SPERANSKY

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THE LOST SWORD OF SHAMYL

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

WHEN Chance so juggles the facts of life as to elicit wonder and incredulity from those who sit and watch, the chronicler who happens to be assigned the performance has, I take it, no option but to record what he sees and leave the reader to marvel or doubt, as his personal turn of mind may dictate ; though the scribe cannot but hesitate at times over how he shall formulate the record.

Leashed by this hesitancy during the past few days while the material has been in my hands, I had the thongs delightfully cut for me by the happy chance of meeting Dr.

Edward Robinson, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, up at Gstaad in the Bernese Oberland and of hearing from him the following story of a suit of armour.

Dr. Bashford Dean, the Curator of Arms and Armour in the Museum, had for years known of a very old suit of armour that was owned by a noble family in Austria and that would be a desirable asset to any collection in the world. For a long time he vainly endeavoured to persuade the Count who is the present head of the family to part with this valuable specimen of the craftsmanship of bygone centuries. Finally the Count yielded and opened negotiations that brought the coveted mail to the work bench of the armourer who prepares the objects in the Museum's collection for exhibition. It consisted not only of the complete suit of the knight but also embraced the trappings for a horse. One afternoon, when the equipment had all been put together to see what pieces might be lacking, the Curator learned

from his craftsman that every piece was found and in its place save a single small scale, which was missing from one of the flexible bands that fell down over the horse's rump. The Curator picked up one of the scales which had just been cleaned, examined it carefully and told his armourer to let the matter stand as it was until the morning, hurrying off home with a curious thought in his mind.

Once inside his door, he went straight to an old box of miscellaneous odds and ends which he had picked up at sales, in junk shops and in various ways both in America and Europe. He dug down till he uncovered the odd piece which had risen before his mind's eye at the armourer's bench. As soon as the Museum doors were open in the morning, he and his assistant were marvelling over the unmistakable similarity in the finely chased, unusual pattern on the two scales they were comparing. The one from his box of junk fitted exactly into the vacant place in the band and once more restored the completed unity of the whole.

And it was thus that the legerdemain of Chance brought that bit of steel back to the niche from which any one of a hundred causes may have filched it years or centuries before.

Such a tale, well known and well vouched for, softens only somewhat the temerity of the juggler in presenting to us the facts in this story of the lost sword of Shamyl. But as an integral part of the larger history of the White Devil of the Black Sea it should, in justice to those who have developed an interest in the vagaries of this man's life, be frankly told and the reader left "to marvel or doubt, as his personal turn of mind may dictate."

To connect him with this historic blade, it is necessary to refer for a moment to the account which the White Devil has given of his "execution" by the Bolsheviks at Orenburg on the night of January 16, 1918, when the Commissar, Popoff, ordered him to be stripped of his arms before he was turned over to the Red guard to be taken into the courtyard and shot. The sword which they

took from him that night was the famous sword of Shamyl. The weapon had come into the family of the White Devil some fifty years before this tragic night when it passed from his hands into those of his enemy.

Although he has not set it down in his own reference to his feelings at losing the weapon which had served him through all his fighting at the German front and later against the Bolsheviks, he has told me personally that he lay and wept after they had stripped him of his arms. Stunned and unnerved as he was by the blow which one of the Red soldiers had dealt him with a musket on the back of his head, this unusual character, who had faced and endured such extraordinary hardships, could now only weep when his sword was gone. At that hour life was running out and there were but a few grains of sand left in the inexorable glass, when an unseen hand slipped in through musketry and bars and turned the fateful gauge. How life came back to him has been recounted in the volume entitled *The White Devil of the Black Sea* ;

it is now our purpose to tell how the sword returned.

First it were desirable to give some idea of who Shamyl was and, if one could, to suggest the endless wealth of legend and story that this Moslem blade could reveal, if only it might speak.

CHAPTER II

SHAMYL

OUT in the land between the Black and the Caspian Seas, toward which the attention of the Western World has just been called by the murder of the American Consul, Major Imbrie, at Tiflis, and which we think of to-day chiefly in terms of Baku oil, there is a rich thread of story running back through all the tapestry of history from the very earliest centuries of recorded time. It was in the ancient land of Colchis at the eastern end of the Black Sea that classical legend domiciled the mythical Golden Fleece with its protecting dragon. Later Iberia claimed this region for its wealth of fruits and vines. And from these classic days down to the present struggle between the Georgians and the Bolsheviks, this country

of the Caucasus, or Colchide, ranges has been the scene of endless racial, religious and political strife.

Probably nowhere in the world is there to-day such a gathering of different tongues and peoples as one finds in the fastnesses of these towering, snow-clad mountains and the plains that border them. Some authorities say that this has come about because of the asylum which the ravines and forests in these mountain valleys afforded to broken and hunted peoples, who have fled from century to century before the engulfing waves of other conquering tribes.

Certain it is that within the past two centuries the plains of Transcaucasia have been the battle ground between Moslem and Christian in their unceasing bloody struggles. Turk and Persian, with their Tartar allies, harassed and slaughtered Christian Armenians and Georgians until, at the end of the eighteenth century, Russia came down from the north and pressed the Georgians under the flag of the Tsars and carried on in a way

this hereditary struggle with the Crescent.

While the lowlands and the south were being consolidated by Russia in her wars during the first half of the nineteenth century, there was developing a struggle for possession of the great Caucasian ranges which dominated so much of the territory to both the north and south of them. Here in the fastnesses of their forests and glens, many Mohammedan tribes were beginning to feel the pinch of the closing ring of steel which gradually drove their brethren back up into the foothills on the edges of the plain.

It was during the second quarter of the century that the definite conquest of the people of the mountains was undertaken by St. Petersburg and that a new and threatening religious movement was started by the Mohammedans which rendered the task of the Tsar's forces doubly difficult and bloody. This movement had its inception in 1822 under the leadership of Moulla Mohammed and took the name of Muridism. It was first purely a revival of religious zeal in its

followers, the Murids, but later assumed a political character, firing the faithful to renew and press their wars against the infidel where'er he could be met.

Over this expanding religious fervour and patriotic zeal, Moulla Mohammed placed as leader his most fanatic pupil, Kazi Moulla, of Ghimree in Daghestan, who took the title of Imam of the Faithful and became the spiritual and political "guide" of all the Moslem tribes of the Caucasus and the neighbouring countries to the north and south. His reign was short, just as was that of his successor, Hamzad Bek, who was assassinated in 1834 in the mosque at Khunzakh.

But Kazi Moulla had a friend, also a native of Ghimree, who followed closely the reviving religious spirit of the Murids and developed an ardent fire that carried him through to leadership of the fighting forces in the field between the years of 1829 and 1834 and in the latter brought him to the pinnacle of Imam. This was Shamyl. Born in 1797, a weakling as a boy, his father a drunkard, he

SHAMYL IMAM OF THE FAITHFUL

was shamed into a religious zeal for improvement and reform that first made of him a strong leader in the wild mountain sports of the tribesmen and later the man whose name struck terror into the hearts of Mussulman and Christian alike through a quarter of a century.

It is almost idle to attempt to give a rounded picture of him in a few paragraphs. Cruel as he was zealous, he enforced his hegemony over the mountain tribes—here by torture and there by prayer. When a district or an *aoul* became disaffected through the ever-tightening circle of Russian successes, he would swoop down out of his mountain stronghold, drive out or exterminate the Russian fortress guard and then wreak terrible vengeance upon those who had dared to give up their allegiance to his cause. Hands and heads went off at his order as lightly as some flower, cracked by his whip, beside a mountain trail.

His military campaigns in defence of the Caucasus against the Russians have been made the subject of many volumes of serious

tone, as well as of a mass of song and story. Passing over his incessant raids into the plains of Daghestan, Georgia and the regions north of the Caucasus, it deserves mention, principally because of the extraordinarily dramatic character of the siege, that after an eighty-day investment his stronghold in Akhulgo was so reduced in 1839 that there was not a fighting man left to surrender with the old men, women and children. And yet Shamyl was not among the number of the captured or the killed. He had even given up his eldest son as a hostage during the first stage of the siege, but when the end came he himself seemed to have vanished. Realizing that defeat was inevitable, he had taken his wife and a younger son, slipped down the rocks during the night, fought his way past a Russian guard at the mouth of a ravine and, though wounded by him, was away and into his native *aoul* of Ghimree while the Russians were still searching for him among the captured and dead of his lost Akhulgo.

Supposedly broken and negligible as a power in the land, he turned up less than a year afterward at the head of another wave of religious and patriotic zeal that swept the mountains and once more puzzled and harassed the generals of the Tsar. Year by year his boldness and his power grew, until in 1845, through tactical errors of the Russian commander, Prince Vorontsoff, his guerrilla forces cut to pieces the column which had penetrated to the very heart of his kingdom, only to leave the greater part of its soldiers and officers along the mountain trails before it could extricate itself from its worse than empty victory.

During succeeding years Fortune flirted with him or flouted him, as best suited her capricious moods ; but never did she rob him of his dominating mien. Whatever else he was, he was always dramatic and, to his struggling mountaineers, a sainted man who prayed for them or wreaked upon their renegades the vengeance of a god. Through it all he maintained a typically Moslem house-

hold with his several wives and hangers-on.

No one will probably ever paint a fitting picture of that extraordinary seraglio he built and dominated at Dargi Vedenno in the wildest part of Chechnia. We have, however, a gripping story of its contradictions of power and squalor, of its loves and jealousies and of some of the most intimate features of its master's life in the account which was given to the outside world by the Georgian captives, Princess Chavchavadze and Princess Orbeliani, who were lifted, with some thirty others, from their country estate at Tsenondahl in 1854 by a revenging troop of Shamyl's forces, who had just suffered a defeat at the hands of the Russians. In their descriptions of his household they give us some idea of the commandeering, forceful and contradictory character of this man who could have as one of his wives a young Armenian captive that preferred to remain with him in her captivity, when offered an opportunity to escape ; and who could order his own mother to be lashed with a hundred strokes on the roof of the

mosque before the crowd for having sought to act as intermediary with her august son in behalf of some wavering tribe that wished to ask either his protection or to be allowed to make peace with their enemies, the Russians. When five of the hundred lashes had fallen upon her aged form, he stripped his own back to take himself the punishment which must be visited upon his house—though he himself had decreed it—and warned those who held the execution of his austere orders in their hands that leniency in the force of the blows would spell death for them. Within a stone's throw of the very spot were the underground pits in which his prisoners of war were kept in a misery indescribable.

In their tale of some of the minor incidents in the seraglio life, the Princesses told of one seemingly unimportant act which throbs with speculative interest for me, as I read their account of it. It was that Shamyl's youngest wife, Aminette, stole one day into her lord's own private quarters to filch therefrom his

revolver case, in order that she might copy the embroidered design for another she was making—but not for him. It flashed across my mind as I read it that there, in the most secret chamber of this mighty leader in the heart of the Caucasus Mountains, she may have touched and handled, in the arms case of her master, the sword of Shamyl, this very sword through which has run such incredibly diverse currents of passion and strife and which has come even into my own hands in such an incredible manner.

Around this Moslem blade such legends are gathered that it is little short of tantalizing to hurry on in disregard of them ; but we have already wandered so far afield from the Urals and the Cossack guard that it is possible only to indicate the vagaries of the sword from this time on.

One must include, however, a word to tell of the fate of the Georgian Princesses, who were released in 1855 after some eight months of confinement and privation only, though, when a ransom of forty thousand

roubles had been collected and, what was much more spectacular, after the son of Shamyl, who had been given up as a hostage at Akhulgo in 1839 and had been subsequently educated and trained as an officer in one of the crack Russian regiments, was brought back to the mountain fastnesses to rejoin his father and his native people. Thoroughly changed in habits and training, he appeared at the frontier rendezvous as a well-groomed Russian officer, but was compelled to abandon his uniform for the native mountaineer costume before being brought into the presence of his father, with whom he even had to talk through an interpreter. When he died some three years later, it was said that melancholia and disappointment had broken his spirit.

As these years were passing, the position of Shamyl became even more prominent throughout Europe, inasmuch as he appeared as a sort of ally to the nations that were fighting Russia in the Crimean War. Successes he had in one form or another, though none

were sufficiently definite to stave off the conquest which the closing of the struggle in the Crimea was bound to make more certain every day. Gradually the Russian commanders not only conquered the outlying tribes but penetrated into his deepest mountain valleys by felling whole forests as they went ; for they had found that arms alone could not serve to bring this fanatic to bay and that they should consequently have to besiege him with the axe as well.

At last at Gunib, in the summer of 1859, several Russian columns concentrated around the great barren rock on which he made his final stand. There, with most of his supporters slain during the grilling siege and with the inevitable end in clearest view, the indomitable pride of this man who had for thirty years incessantly fought the infidel and his political enemies almost turned him back at the last moment to perish with his whole force rather than surrender ; for he had started out from his stronghold in company with a Russian officer who had come to treat

with him, when his appearance drew a shout of exultation from the soldiers of the Tsar. Angered, he turned to retreat within the walls, when only the cleverness of the officer saved the situation by telling him the troops were shouting in his honour.

Such was the end of all his strife and there at Gunib he handed over to the Russian General, Prince Bariatinsky, his sword and with it the unrestricted power over the last fastnesses of the Colchis ranges.

Hammered into the blade of this weapon, as it was surrendered, there stood the word "Чилла" in letters of gold. Russian friends, whom I consulted as to its meaning, were unable to give me any light on it, nor was it to be found in the Russian dictionaries. Later an official who had been much in Mohammedan countries, on hearing my question, made the very evident suggestion that this was simply another form of transliteration of the well-known "*chela*" of the Moslem tongues, meaning a religious pupil, a novice or a follower of the Prophet. What

must have been the sensations in the indomitable and fanatical breast, when his beloved *Chela* passed into the hands of his Russian conqueror ?

Several well-known Russian artists have preserved the spirit and atmosphere of this scene in now famous canvases ; just as Tolstoi and others of the leading writers of the country have made the Caucasus and the wars of Shamyl the subject of many an interesting volume. But for all these the sword of Shamyl passed quietly out of sight, until it has come once more to light through the tragic life experiences of one of that very class of Russian officers against whom he fought so doggedly and persistently.

It was Prince Bariatinsky who gave the weapon as a present to the grandfather of the White Devil, so that here we may turn again to the narrative of the White Devil himself. We have seen from the opening paragraphs how this officer was stripped of the sword by the Bolshevik commissar. Owing to the fact that the return of the blade

to him by way of the incident of my own hands involves the story of another Cossack officer, it is necessary next to follow the White Devil through some of the early experiences of his boyhood years as the only real way of appreciating fully what the measure of loyalty between one Cossack and another must have been to have induced this native of the Caucasus country to undertake the risks which he assumed for the recovery of the sword. In order that the tale may run more simply and more intimately, the text of the White Devil is left in the first person and as nearly as possible in the original form of the notes he has made for me.

CHAPTER III

THE WHITE DEVIL BEGINS HIS TALE

WHEN we were quite young boys, my oldest brother and myself had our heads so full of mischief that no governess or tutor could manage us, especially when we went off for our summer holidays at our estate on the steppes that stretched away from the southern foothills of the Urals. There, with plenty of horses at our disposal, some of which were still half-wild, we spent days and weeks galloping madly over these grassy plains in a manner that kept our parents in a constant state of worry for the safety of our necks. Both my brother and I were annoyed as only boys can be when my father called us one morning and said :

" Look here, you two scamps, I have had enough of this life of always expecting one of

you to be brought home with a broken arm or leg and, as all the tutors that you have thus far had have refused to remain, I have written to ask a Cossack to come and have a try at looking after you. He will be here in a day or two, and I shall give him full power over you, so as to be able to proceed calmly with my work and business without having always to worry over you two ! "

We did not answer a word, but, when we were out of sight and alone, we held a long council of war and decided that we should use all our forces to make life miserable for the Cossack and to compel him to beat a retreat. We cursed all the Cossacks in the world and swore a blood bond to do anything rather than give up our freedom.

The first item in our campaign was to institute sentry duty to watch the road that led down the long hill toward town, and one day when our field-glass revealed a carriage coming along it with a likely-looking subject for a Cossack slave-driver aboard, we carried out, with the speed of old campaigners, the next move—

back to the stable, into the saddles and away. We did not return until evening and faced the round scolding from our father as just one of the regular hardships of war, from which no man should flinch.

With the liberty of our movements somewhat restricted, we could not do any effective scouting that evening, but the next morning we made a reconnaissance in force, when father introduced us to Gastan and revealed to us the character of our enemy—six feet six of frame and a big, black beard. On second glance I remarked that he had a really handsome face and that what struck me most about it was the kindly expression in his eyes.

After father had finished our introduction to him—which, I must say, was not flattering to us—the first thing Gastan said was :

" Now come and show me your horses."

These few, simple words quite changed my opinion of Gastan, which I had set in the cement of a boy's determination even before seeing him. I had feared that he would be

just the same as all our former tutors. One of these, an Englishman, liked riding but had no feeling for the horses themselves, at times being even cruel to them. This constantly stirred up furious disputes between us. The three French tutors were simply afraid of horses and, because of this, had been so despised by us that we would have nothing to do with them.

We took Gastan all through the stables, showing him our whole collection of riding, driving and farm animals. As he admired some and commented upon others, with a keen eye for all their salient points, I began to feel that I rather liked him. Then he asked us whether we had a mount ready for him.

Before Gastan's arrival my father had directed me to go out into the steppes to one of our farms, where our herds of horses were pasturing, and choose a good animal for the Cossack. Here I must confess that, as I had promised myself to make his life impossible, I decided to secure the wildest

beast I could find. Assisted by two Kirghizi, I caught a lovely grey five-year-old, which had never yet had a bit in its mouth. When we had thrown the beast with the lasso, that had choked it into submission, all three of us fell on it and forced it to take the bridle. Then I strode it and ordered the men to loosen the knot and take the lasso from its neck. For a moment the animal lay still, catching its breath ; then it gave a sudden spring and was on its feet in a flash. As it was not the first time I had to break a wild horse, I was ready for this and a great deal more ; so I kept my seat and held on tight.

And then the fun began. At first the horse stood for a moment shivering and uncertain, then bounded into the air and started bucking and twisting, with its back arched and its nose down between its knees. Before I could foresee the surprise of a new trick, it went once more clear into the air and fell on its side, pinning my leg under it. I felt a sharp pain in the knee, as the two Kirghizi rushed to help me and caught hold of the

horse. Though it was with great difficulty that I got up and in spite of the fact that I was suffering such pain that I could not bend or move my knee, I remember distinctly that I was pleased over having found what I went for.

When Gastan asked for his horse, I told the grooms to bring out the five-year-old. After looking it all over, he asked :

" Who has ridden this horse ? "

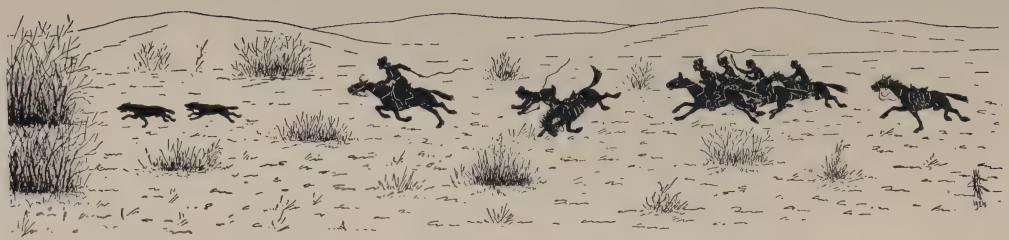
" No one except myself," I answered with no little pride.

One of the grooms handed Gastan a bridle, with which he approached the horse, only to have the wild animal in a flash snap at him and tear part of his sleeve away. Gastan, without any anger or reproach in his eyes, gave me a look of complete understanding and, before I had time to realize what was happening, seized the animal by the ear, forced the bridle over its head and was on its back. One could see that the horse was taken entirely unawares by such swiftness and strength, as it stood for a short interval

without moving. When it recovered and started the same tricks it had played with me, Gastan knew better how to manage it. He gave it a strong blow with his whip on the rump. When it reared high in the air, Gastan landed his enormous fist between its ears and brought it to its knees. Under the further plying of the whip, the grey twisted and lunged a bit and ended by breaking into a mad, wild gallop off into the steppes which had been its life-long home.

After about an hour we sighted Gastan coming in. As they approached our admiring group at the stables, I could see that the grey was covered with foam and quite blown but was walking quietly as though it had been ridden for years. This broke down all my offensive and defensive strategy, leaving me no option but to surrender in open admiration to Gastan. After this I thought that everything he did was marvellous and, with this change in my attitude, I came to love him.

During later years we found that in the



A KIRGIZ WOLF HUNT IN THE STEPPES

ordinary affairs of life he never limited our freedom. He was always ready at any moment to come with us for a ride or to join us on a hunting or fishing expedition. It was not long before we had become so attached to him that I did not like to go anywhere without him. He was always jolly and cheerful and never cross with us when we played practical jokes on him. He only laughed and seemed to enjoy them, nor did he neglect his chances to turn the tables upon us. From my present standpoint of judgment, so far removed from the freedom and the wildness of our life on the steppes, I am forced to admit that our jokes were rather rough at times. For instance, when we were walking across a river or a stream on a narrow bridge, our great joy was to push him off into the water. At other times, we ran away with his clothes while he was in bathing.

But what I loved most in our life together were the evenings round a camp fire, during our frequent hunting and fishing excursions ;

for Gastan was full of stories about his service in the mountains on the Turkish frontier. These tales so thrilled and fascinated me that I always tried in my boyish mind to imagine myself the hero of some daring chase after contrabandists.

Our favourite pastime during the summer was to go for five or six days on one of these camping expeditions somewhere in the wilds of the mountains, fifty or sixty miles from home. We always took with us everything we might need for fishing or for shooting birds and bigger game ; for the forests in this part of the Urals teemed with all kinds of game and the streams carried such quantities of excellent fish that you could take them to your heart's content with rod, net or spear.

CHAPTER IV

GASTAN

I WANTED to know all sides of Gastan's character in the various realms of our life, so I immediately asked permission to go camping for a week. As my father always encouraged everything that tended to develop a love of sport in us, we easily secured our wish and had the departure fixed for the second day following. The first day went in loading cartridges, looking over the rods, mending the nets and in making all the other exciting preparations. By the following morning all the camping, hunting and fishing equipment was ready, loaded on a *telega*, or Russian peasant waggon, and despatched to a place that I was particularly fond of about sixty miles away in the wildest part of the mountains, where I knew we should have

plenty of sport. Our butler, a very experienced hunter and fisherman, was in charge of all the supplies and went along with them on the *telega*, preferring this to riding with us, because of his enormous weight.

Early the next morning the rest of us set off on horseback. We were five in all : my eldest brother, Gastan, the chief forester, the second steward and myself. Every one was in high spirits, the weather was glorious and we were all enjoying the ride immensely. At about six or seven miles from the house the road left the steppes to turn into a lovely forest, where the hills began.

At about noon we reached one of our farms situated on a river called the Ik. Leaving the horses in charge of the stable-man, we hurried down to the stream for a plunge into the beautifully clear and cool waters that were carrying the spirit of the Urals into the plains. Following the swim, we had a good dinner and a two-hours' rest for the horses before starting on the remaining thirty miles of our journey.

Gastan began telling us all sorts of funny stories about his experiences, with which he made us laugh till our sides ached. When he stopped, one of the others would take the rôle ; and thus the time slipped by so rapidly that we were astonished when we found the evening stealing down upon us as we watched the summit of a near-by hill and heard the forester cry out :

" Here we are, for there is Peter putting up the tents and arranging the camp."

The sight was a beautiful one. Across the valley the rocky face of the mountain was softened and veiled by the pink haze of the setting sun. There at the foot of the ledge lay our newly opened camp, close to the bank of a small mountain stream, known to us as the Iniàk. When we rode up with shouts of joy, we found our supper all ready for us. Peter had prepared a steaming kettle of *ukha*, or fish soup, and a platter of fried fish, which he had caught in the river about two hours before.

We were no more than out of our saddles

before a group of Bashkirs approached, welcomed us to their country and invited us to come and visit them in their camp, which was not far away from ours. They offered at the same time to help us with our fishing and to guide us to the best shooting grounds in the neighbourhood. We thanked them and arranged to go to see them in the morning. Then we gathered round our fire and set to on Peter's meal, which appeased us for a time. With the fatigue from the long ride and the excitement over the morrow we were soon ready to prepare for the night by feeding the horses and spreading a thick layer of hay on the ground in our tent.

In the morning the sun was just beginning to warm the tops of the mountains far above us as we tumbled into the stream for our bath before breakfast. By five o'clock we were away with all our fishing tackle for the Bashkir camp, where the chief of the local tribe and about a dozen others met us. After their formal welcome they invited us into one of their *yurtas* to have some tea and

discuss the fishing campaign "around a teapot," as they put it. When we had squatted on the lovely rugs covering the ground inside the tent, the conversation began.

The Bashkirs offered everything one could possibly imagine for our fishing operations. They told us that all the men of the village were at our disposal and that they would bring their own net, which was much longer than ours and could reach all the way across the river. It was decided that we should fish during the morning and go shooting in the afternoon or on the following day. In about an hour everything was ready, the Bashkir net was in the river and the sport was on.

The enormous net had to be hauled by at least ten of us at either end, as we were seining up the stream. When we had thus worked into the current for about half a mile, the most exciting moment came as the party on the opposite bank had to cross with their end of the net to our side. Some of the Bashkirs came across in a canoe, while others jumped

into the water and swam outside the closing arc of the net, splashing and shouting, to prevent the fish from escaping, while our two groups were drawing the bow closer to the bank. Gastan and I became so excited that we pulled off our boots and outer clothing and dived into the stream.

One of the varieties of larger fish in the river is very intelligent. As soon as it feels it is being surrounded or confined, it begins leaping into the air in an attempt to clear the seine. Knowing this, the Bashkirs swim behind the net and make a terrible uproar to frighten the fish away from it. When the fish break into the air, the men in the stream even try to catch them amid the wild encouragement or the jeers of their fellow-workers. Once the two ends of the net are on the same bank, it must be drawn most carefully and expeditiously, or all the catch will be "over the top." It was this barbaric mêlée of swimming, shouting men, grabbing at and often catching great leaping fish, that pulled Gastan and me into the stream. When at

last the net was dragged ashore, we were quite astounded by the number and variety of our catch. There were hundreds of eel-pouts, bream and carp of several varieties. When I told the Bashkirs to take most of the fish for themselves, leaving us a few for the next day or two, they refused absolutely to do so, saying :

" You have come to fish in our rivers, and everything that is caught is yours. It would be an offence against our laws of hospitality for us to take even one of the smallest fish from you, for you are our guests."

I tried to explain to them that the fish would only spoil, inasmuch as we could not possibly eat them all nor keep them for five or six days until our return home ; and that, even if we could preserve them, we had not sufficient transportation to carry all this quantity back with us.

" Do not worry about that," responded the chief. " To-morrow morning your parents will have fresh fish for breakfast."

Nor did we worry any longer, for in about

an hour all the catch, save the few we kept, was loaded on three waggons and started for our home under the cracking whips of the Bashkirs.

With the fishing finished, we were all invited to dine with the chief of the village. I always felt that those Eastern feasts were trying and little short of ridiculous. When we had all seated ourselves cross-legged in a circle on a beautiful rug, they first brought in an enormous bowl of kumiss, or fermented mare's milk, and passed it round for every one to drink a ladleful—and all from the same ladle at that. Then, instead of the soup one would expect, a large dish of stewed fruit appeared, followed by a course of rice cooked with raisins and little pieces of mutton. Next came mutton pies, then more mutton and rice, this time swimming in grease. When all the apparent combinations of mutton and rice were exhausted, the serious part of the dinner yielded to pastries, tea and the inevitable Oriental conversation. All of us felt so stuffed after such a meal that there

could be no thought of fishing or hunting before we had had a good nap. Carrying out a most welcome feature of their hospitality, the Bashkirs left us to occupy their tent alone, where we were all asleep just a few minutes later.

When we woke up at about four o'clock, the circle reformed for a discussion of our further plans, and it was soon decided that we should go and have a try at the trout. For this purpose we had to tramp about two miles up a small stream that flows into the Ik. We were making our way through the thick bushes, talking and laughing, when suddenly Gastan's voice was heard in a muffled:

"Stop! Don't move!"

As he was only five or six yards away from me on the left, I could see him poised, with his dagger held by the point in his lifted hand. In a twinkling his forearm jerked and the knife went hurtling through the air. As it struck, Gastan started forward with a boyish yell and a cry of:

" I've got him ! "

" Got what ? " we asked as we hurried to his side.

Following Gastan's pointing hand, we saw a big badger pinned to the ground with the Cossack's dagger, which is really a dirk with a blade about twenty inches long. Amazed and tremendously pleased at this spectacular display of Gastan's skill, I made him promise on the spot to teach me the trick of using a poignard in this way.

Years later, in 1918, I had great fun in showing this trick to the officers on board the British destroyer *Parthian*, when she was tied up at Yalta. It took their fancy at once and stirred a tremendous spirit of rivalry among them. I left the Captain in the wardroom late that evening, practising with my dagger at a board put up in the corner. I found him right there in the morning at about nine o'clock, fast asleep in an arm-chair, with the dagger sticking in the board in front of him. When I woke him, the first thing he said was :

"I've got it at last! I kept at it until seven o'clock this morning!"

The badger was given to the Bashkirs for them to take the pelt. As we came to a small clearing in the brush, we stopped for fishing at a point where the stream was not more than two yards wide. The Bashkir method of trout-fishing is very simple and criminally unsportsmanlike from the standpoint of the disciple of Izaak Walton who gracefully throws a white hackle or a red miller. Two men hold a net across the stream, while a third enters the water a few yards above and beats it with a stick or a branch as he wades down the current. The net is then drawn and the trout tumbled into a basket.

After having filled two baskets in this way with trout of different sizes, we felt that we had made a fair piscatorial showing for one day and started back to camp with thoughts centred on the welcome rest which we should have after such an outing. I feel that I shall never, as long as I live, forget those

lovely evenings during our camping trips in the mountains.

Once back at our bivouac, we changed our wet clothes and gathered round a big fire the coachman had already prepared for us. Too tired for a real meal, we had only some tea with bread and butter. The moon was shining full, and the air was remarkably still. The silence of the great forest was broken only by the distant wail of a Bashkir's bamboo flute, a *chibuzga*, sending across the night its depressingly monotonous tones.

" Do you wish me to brew you a Caucasian drink ? " Gastan suddenly broke in.

With our unanimous acceptance voted, he took a camp pail, poured some red and white wine into it, crossed two daggers over the top, placed a big half-pound lump of sugar on the blades, poured brandy over this and set it afire. Then the pail was placed on the red-hot coals and allowed to come to a boil. Every few minutes he poured more brandy over the sugar, which continued to burn with a lovely blue flame, as the melting sweet

GASTAN BREWING THE ZHONKA

dripped into the wine below. When the brew began simmering, Gaston took it off the coals and waited for the brandy to burn out. Then the drink was ready, and we all tasted it. I know not whether it was our mood or the influence of our surroundings, but certainly we all found it most delicious. In the Caucasus this drink goes by the name of "*zhonka*."

While we sipped his mountain brew, Gastan began relating to us all sorts of humorous stories. One among them always remains vivid in my mind. It recounted what happened to him and a friend of his when they were serving on the Turkish frontier not very far from a town called Kars.

"It was early in the autumn," he began, "that a pal of mine, who is now a sergeant-major in His Majesty's escort, and I decided to go into the forest the following morning to gather pears from an enormous tree we had discovered, when patrolling along the frontier. We turned in immediately after supper, having told no one about our plans,

in order that we might secure as many pears as possible for ourselves. When I woke up at about three o'clock in the morning, I suddenly remembered that I had not given my horse sufficient hay for the night and so crept out quietly to the stable, tended to the horse, came back to the kitchen and lighted the fire ; for, I thought, once I was up, I might as well make some tea for us before we started out. We had plenty of time before the light.

" When the water began boiling, I went into our room to wake my friend. You can imagine my astonishment when I found his bed empty. I was furious. The scoundrel had evidently tricked me and had gone for the pears alone ! I forgot all about the tea and set off in a hurry to run him down.

" As I approached the pear-tree it was beginning to get light. I called out, but no one answered. Coming up closer and pressing the bushes aside, I was dumfounded to see the body of my friend lying face downward. I cautiously approached and discovered bloodstains on the grass not far from him

and, on examining them, found they led off into the wood. Following the trail for about fifty yards, I came upon a dead bear.

"I rushed back and began shaking my friend in distraught fright. After a few moments, to my surprise and infinite relief, he opened his eyes and gazed at me with a scared look.

"'What the devil has happened?' I asked him, 'and what does the dead bear mean?'

"'The dead bear—Oh Lord! Do you really mean he is dead?'

"'Certainly I do.'

"'Where is he?'

"I led him into the bushes and showed him the dead animal. He took off his hat and made the sign of the cross.

"'I can hardly remember what happened to me,' he said. 'I woke this morning and, seeing your bed empty, thought you had stolen off and left me behind; so I jumped up and started out. As I came up to the tree in the dusk, I could just distinguish your figure, bending over and gathering up

the pears. I decided to pay you back by frightening you, and so crept up and pounced on you from behind with a wild cry. But instead of your coat I found I had something furry in my hands. At the same time there came a frightful roar. I remember nothing further ! ' "

Gastan's friend had mistaken a bear for him, scared it with his ruse and then had fainted from fright himself. It is an accepted fact among the mountaineers that, when a bear is suddenly and sharply frightened, a bloodvessel often bursts and causes his death. Gastan closed the yarn with the statement that they returned with a cart in the morning to haul the animal back to camp.

Too tired and sleepy from our long day in the open to listen further, we all crawled into one of the tents and soon were fast asleep. Three or four times in the night I felt somebody covering me up. On opening my eyes, I found it was Gastan, who watched over us like a nurse to see that we should be well covered and not catch cold.

In the morning we were up with the sun and at breakfast began discussing the plans for the coming day. It was decided that we had had enough fishing for the present and that we ought to have some shooting now. So many were the opportunities that there was only one question to decide, and that was as to the kind of game we should select. After a short discussion of the numerous possibilities, we chose bustards for our first venture. Lashed on by our enthusiasm, we finished our breakfast in a hurry and set off. As the bustard is only to be found in the steppes, we were forced to travel from twelve to fifteen miles out of the mountains and through the woods before we came to the hunting grounds on the plains.

There is quite a unique and special way of hunting this bird, for it is extremely intelligent and cautious, allowing practically no one to approach it either on foot, on horseback or in a waggon. A sentinel bird always stands guard a bit away from the flock and, as soon as you approach, gives a loud warning

cry that sends all the birds off, first on a wild run and then to spread their enormous wings for the take-off that lifts them clumsily into their slow-measured flight.

The way we outwit them on the steppes is rather interesting and peculiar. All the hunters sit on one side of a large hay-waggon, on the other side of which the hay is loaded high enough to keep them from being seen. The waggon is drawn by two horses and driven by some one dressed as a peasant ; for the bustard takes notice even of your costume.

With this outfit the party scours the steppes until a flock of bustard is sighted, when the driver begins describing a great circle about the birds in such a way that the hay remains always toward the game. After the gradually narrowing spiral has been brought down small enough, the hunters begin dropping off the waggon to lie flat and motionless in the grass in a semi-circle. When the driver has completed a little more than this half-circle, he heads the horses straight for the birds and slowly approaches them. The sentinel bird

THE BUSTARD HUNT

gives the alarm, and all the flock, if the driver s deliberate enough and does not make too much noise, walk slowly away in the direction of the hunters, lying hidden in the grass. When the birds thus come down within range, one of the hunters gives a signal, at which every one jumps up and begins shooting.

That day we came upon two flocks of bustards and took nine of them home with us, though each of the groups contained more than twenty birds. By sunset we were back at camp, hungry as the wolves around us but all in high spirits after our successful hunt.

The next day we spent in duck-shooting and ended it delightfully around the camp-fire, chatting with a rich Bashkir. Knowing that he was rich and that he had great herds of animals, I asked him :

" Tell me, Abdul, how much money have you ? "

" Well," he said, " more than forty but less than fifty."

"Fifty what?" I asked, not understanding what he meant.

"Don't you know? Thousands of roubles, of course!"

"And in what bank do you keep your money?"

He looked at me for a moment with an ironical smile and then answered:

"Do you really think I am such a fool as to keep my money in a bank? Don't forget that my whole fortune consists of my herds and these forty odd thousand roubles; and, if I leave my money in a bank, I am sure to lose it, because all of them become bankrupt sooner or later. So I am not going to risk my savings in that way!"

"But where do you keep it then?"

"Right here," answered the man of the plains and, leading me over to his tent, he lifted a rug from a medium-sized chest covered with metal.

Pulling a key out of his pocket and thrusting it into the lock, he began turning it, first to the right and then to the left. At every

turn the lock gave forth sounds like those of a music box. It was a secret lock, and this was the reason why he turned the key in either direction several times.

At last the music ceased, and he lifted the lid. There we saw rows of hundred-rouble banknotes spread on a small piece of rug just the size of the chest. Under the first little carpet was another one with the same arrangement, and so on to the very bottom.

"And how many horses have you?" one of us asked him.

"Well, about four hundred!" he answered.

"Why do you say 'about'? Don't you know exactly how many there are in your herd?"

"Oh, certainly not; for I have not seen them these past two months. Perhaps some of them are dead, some stolen; perhaps some colts have been born and probably a few stray animals have joined the herd."

"But why have you not seen your horses? Where are they?"

"Oh, we always turn them loose in spring,

you see, when we move from winter quarters into tents ourselves. They roam all over the mountains in search of the best pasture. The herd always keeps together, and all the horses are marked, so that there is no difficulty in finding them in the autumn."

"But is there no one to guard the herd?"

"No, nobody," he replied with a quiet smile.

"And why are you not afraid of your horses being stolen?"

"Well, if some are stolen, the greater part of them will, however, be left to me."

"But if your horses should trample somebody's grain fields and destroy them, then, according to the law, the landowner has got the right of holding the whole herd until you pay the fine."

"I am not at all afraid of that," Abdul responded simply. "If anyone attempts to keep the herd, the feeding of them will cost him so much that he will soon turn them loose, and I shall not have to pay any fine!"

It was an extraordinary way of meeting

difficulties that the Bashkir had, and what astonished us most was his undisturbed calm in dealing with our different questions.

The next day we broke up our camp in the mountains and set off home with a goodly stock of fish and bustards and feeling very lively and gay, after the few days spent in such wonderful surroundings.

Significant news was awaiting us at home. A few weeks earlier Gastan had asked my father's permission to bring his nephew from the Caucasus to live with him, for the boy had lost his father and had no one to look out for his training except his old and sickly mother, who had all she could do caring for his sisters—and then the Cossacks do not like to have boys brought up by the women alone. When we came in, Gastan found a letter, foretelling the arrival of Mikhal in the near future. Both my brother and I were very glad at the thought of having a new companion to go about with. Gastan told us that his nephew was a good rider, although he was two years younger than I, and

also that he was full of fun and mischief.

I had a special and quite secret reason for looking forward to the coming of a new friend. A gang of horse-thieves had been operating in our neighbourhood for some time, and no one was able to run them down. The idea of capturing them myself had followed and dominated me from the very first days I heard about them ; but I had no companion for the task, as my brother was not over-fond of such adventures. To Gastan I could not mention the matter, for I knew that he would forbid it, and alone it was impossible to do anything effective. So I had a whole plan worked out by myself and was only waiting for a companion to complete my forces.

One day just after our return, while we were at dinner, we were startled by the sound of the alarm bell. We all rushed out and saw that our distillery, right at the end of the village and about two miles away, was on fire. In a very few minutes the fire brigade was off and a carriage for my father and a

mount for me were at the door. I was away without waiting for the others.

When I arrived, the whole distillery building, an old wooden structure put up some fifty years before by my grandfather, was in flames. At about twenty yards from it stood a new brick building, in which the rectification of the spirit was carried on. At that moment there were roughly a million bottles of spirit within its walls, and the fire brigade, the peasants and all the employees of the estate were working hard to prevent the flames from spreading to this building. However, all our efforts were in vain. The window-frames and the doors caught fire through the terrible heat from the other structure, which had already collapsed.

My father, wishing to see what was happening inside the rectification building, went up an outside staircase to the top story. Cries were heard from all around:

" Do not go up ! The drums may explode at any minute, and the whole building will be in flames ! "

But father gave no heed to the warnings and went inside. I was in despair and did not know what to do.

Suddenly I saw Gastan elbowing and pushing his way through the crowd. Once free, he dashed up the steps three at a time and disappeared through the door. An anxious silence held us all for a minute or two, until a voice from the other side broke the spell with:

"The building is on fire! The flames have reached the storerooms. Clear the place, for there will be an explosion in a moment!"

The crowd fell back and left my brother and myself standing alone at the bottom of the staircase. Smoke and flames burst out of the windows, and our hearts sank; but at the same moment the door at the top of the stairs flew open and Gastan emerged in a stream of thick, black smoke, carrying father in his arms. Father was struggling to get loose but made no headway against the vice-like grip in which Gastan held him and which he never loosened for a second until he reached the bottom of the stairs.

"Who asked you to interfere?" cried my father in a fury. "I could see the men working below and could direct them very well from where I stood."

"Excuse me, sir, but don't you know what can happen there at any moment?"

My father would have continued the protest but for a sudden interruption by a dull, powerful rumble.

"Run!" cried Gastan.

We were off just in time, for a few seconds afterward the greater explosion came with the crash of breaking windows, followed by a second and a third. We stopped at a safe distance, and only then did my father realize what a tremendous risk he had taken. He thanked Gastan heartily and explained:

"I could not see, from where I was, what was happening on the other side of the building and did not realize the danger. I shall never forget what you have done for me to-day!"

After this my feeling for Gastan took an even stronger turn, now that he had saved my father from certain death.

CHAPTER V

THE COMING OF MIKHAL

JUST a few days later Father told me that he was going with Gastan into the Turgai prairies to the east of the Urals to buy horses and that he would take me with him if I cared to go. Certainly I did care, and that very much, for the thought of going into the wild steppes for just as wild horses, which had never known saddle or bridle, made my heart leap with joy.

Early the next morning we set off in a four-seated carriage drawn by five horses, hitched three abreast on the whiffletrees with the remaining pair in front. One of these leaders was ridden by a young boy. The journey that lay ahead of us was a long one, nothing less than one hundred and fifty to sixty miles over the steppes.

MIKHAL'S NARROW ESCAPE FROM WILD BOARS

It was only towards evening on the follow-day that we arrived at a Kirghiz camp, where we knew we should find the owners of the best studs in the region. As we tumbled out, my father greeted an old Kirghiz and told him what we had come for. We were at once very hospitably invited into a large nomad tent, or *kibitka*, and served with a native dinner, during which father discussed our business with the proprietor.

Sheik-ul-Islam-Mersia-Uddinovitch Abdulin, for thus was the old man called, said that his herds were grazing some distance away but that he would at once despatch two riders to drive them nearer, so that, if we wished to, we could ride out in the morning to meet them and select the animals we wanted.

Early the next day, when we emerged from the *kibitka*, we found three saddled horses waiting for us, together with two others for Abdulin and his son. Though small of build, the horses were remarkable and flew along like Arabs, apparently tireless. After having covered a distance of about ten miles

on them at an extraordinary pace, we saw a cloud of dust rolling up the horizon.

"There is the herd approaching. Let us stop here," said the old Kirghiz.

We all dismounted and allowed our horses to go free. They were trained to keep close to their riders, as in the steppes there is not even so much as a bush to tie them to and the natives consequently train their animals to meet these conditions. When the herd, which consisted of about fifteen hundred horses, drew close to us, Abdulin's riders suddenly encircled them and, with wild shouts and the cracking of their long whips, rounded the whole drove up into a close mass.

For a time we stood fixed in admiration of some of the beautiful animals in front of us, as they savagely looked at us with their wild, bloodshot eyes. It soon became evident that it would be impossible to make a proper inspection and choice in that way and that we could also not go among them at all, as they put back their ears and swung round to

open fire with their hoofs the moment we came anywhere near them.

Consequently Abdulin ordered his men to drive the whole herd slowly backward and forward in front of us, whereupon my father pointed out the animals he liked, and the herdsmen, with an astonishing ability, separated them from the others with their whips or their *kriutchok* (the pole with a noose at the end of it, also called *urga*) and ran them off to the side where other herdsmen guarded them. This was no easy task, inasmuch as the separated animals were always bolting and trying to rejoin their companions. Working in this manner, it took us the whole day to select the four hundred animals we wanted, so that the sun was already touching the horizon when we mounted our steeds and turned back toward Abdulin's camp.

For the four hundred horses the old Kirghiz asked and was paid eleven thousand roubles, and the newly acquired herd was ordered off along the route of our homeward journey, to wait for us at a distance of about

twenty miles. In the morning it was decided that Gastan should accompany and help the herdsmen to bring them to our place. On hearing this, I begged to be allowed to go with him and, rejoicing in the permission, took leave of my father after we had joined the drove.

That day we had to cover about thirty miles more with the animals to reach Orenburg, where we intended to stop for a time to make some purchases. Roughly a mile from this town on the opposite side of the river Ural there was a vast enclosure like a tremendous great courtyard, each side of which was bounded by a long, two-storied building. The lower story was cut up into small rooms something less than ten feet wide and twenty feet long, with no other entrance for light and air save the iron door opening on the court. These cave-like chambers housed the little Eastern shops of this huge bazaar, in which you could pass indefinite hours examining and bargaining for the most varied and wonderful Oriental carpets, rugs, woollens and silks, gold and

SELECTING WILD KIRGIZ HORSES

silver plate, all sorts of ancient Eastern harness and saddles, decorated with gold and silver, with turquoise and with other semi-precious stones. You could also find here all sorts of furs at ridiculously low prices—beaver, sable, black fox, marten, ermine et cetera.

This bazaar is about three hundred and fifty years old and was built when the gathering power of modern Russia began to reach out for the Eastern trade that has formed so intimate a part of its later life—when the endless caravans from Thibet, Mongolia, Bokhara and Khiva came to sell or exchange their wares. The principal method of trade in these olden days was barter, and this is why the great enclosure bears to this day the name of "*Menovoi Dvor*" or "the Exchange Court."

In the centre of the enclosure stands a mosque, as ancient as all the rest; while the second story over the shops in the side buildings serves as a sort of hotel or, rather, "lodgings to let" for all the Eastern merchants and herdsmen arriving at the bazaar. During the days that we remained

in Orenburg our horses grazed on the steppes and at night were driven inside the *Menovoi Dvor* to protect them from the numerous gangs of horse thieves that were plying their trade about the place. Because of their insinuating presence no horse is ever allowed to leave the yard without a pass from the administrative office of the bazaar, and the permit is issued only after one's ownership has been satisfactorily established.

The very first morning after our arrival in Orenburg, while I was having breakfast with Gastan, some one knocked at the door and, in response to our "*Voideetye*," a young Cossack boy entered. It was none other than Mikhal, who had just arrived and who was destined to play such an intimate rôle in my own life.

When Gastan, after talking for a while with his nephew, went out to make his purchases and left us two alone, I began asking the new-comer all sorts of questions in my attempt to find out whether he was of the same mould as his uncle. At first he was so shy that I could not make much

headway. Trying a new tack, I asked him :

" Do you want me to show you the horses which we have just bought and which Gastan and I are driving to our estate ? "

I had evidently struck his note, for his eyes glistened as he answered :

" With pleasure ! " and sprang to his feet. " Let's go at once ! "

I realized then that sitting quietly inside house walls and talking was not meant for him, and I understood fully his feelings. We left the inn and secured a drosky to take us out across the river to the *Menovoi Dvor*. When I told him, in answer to his many questions about the number and character of the horses we had purchased, that we had four hundred quite wild animals that had never even felt a bridle, he nearly jumped out of the carriage with excitement.

" Yes, and now you and I are going to choose our own horses out of the drove to break and ride," I added—to run his cup over—as the *izvostchik* pulled up in front of the main gate of the *Menovoi Dvor*.

We at once borrowed two mounts from a Kirghiz whom I knew and, finding out in which direction our drove was grazing, galloped off in search of it. The horses were not far away, so that in about half an hour we could see them on the bank of a little river, the Berdianka, which at this point is the border line between Europe and Asia. I called the chief herdsman over and, asking him for two lassoes, told him that we were going to pick out two mounts for ourselves. He tried to protest, seeing only two young boys in front of him and knowing nothing of the experience we had both had in breaking and riding wild horses.

"Just you wait and see!" I called back at him, as we flew right up to the frightened herd.

During the ride from Abdulin's camp to Orenburg, one animal had specially attracted my attention. He was a pure black stallion without a single mark on him and seemed to be the leader of the herd, as he was always in front, not only on the regular march but whenever the herd started any mischief, when

we could always see the magnificent mane and the thick, long tail of my favourite combed by the wind at the very head of the drove.

Spying him on the opposite side of the herd, I bent down on my beast and started for him. The stallion noticed us at once, seemed to guess what we were up to, thrust his beautiful head out in defiance and, kicking high into the air, broke for the open. Both Mikhal and I flattened our horses out after him in a wild, intoxicating chase.

The coal-black beast with his eyes a-fire twisted and turned in the steppe, trying always to evade us ; and it was difficult to guess what his next trick would be. Our horses were tiring, and I began losing hope of ever catching this wild embodiment of speed, when I suddenly discovered that the river made round a sharp point right in front of us. I gave a whistle and waved my hand to Mikhal, pointing out our chance. He understood, and we slashed our mounts into renewed efforts of speed.

We cornered the black stallion right at

the river. He was just ready for a leap into the water, but our two lassoes, thrown from different sides, whizzed through the air and encircled the neck of our noble prey. In a moment we were on the ground, where I shouted to Mikhal to hold on, while I snatched the bridle off my mount. Then, pulling on our lassoes in opposite directions, we succeeded in nearly choking the animal and, as it went down on its knees, worked our way up our ropes and forced the bridle over its head. Then I held the reins, ready at any moment to jump on its back, while Mikhal unfastened the nooses around the beast's neck.

In a moment it was up on its feet with me on its back. After two or three kicks and bounds it shot off into the plain at a terrific speed and only began slackening its pace at the end of nearly an hour of this unbroken gallop.

Then followed the last act in the taming of our wild monarch of the steppes. I brought my whip, or *nagaika*, into action and introduced him to his new master. These

ROPING THE BLACK STALLION

first blows that the beautiful beast had ever received in its life made it give a tremendous bound forward and redouble its pace. This lasted for another half-hour, by the end of which the black was white with foam, but as obedient and quiet as a lamb.

Mikhal's horse proved less difficult to capture for, instead of tearing away from the drove, it tried to bury itself in the middle of it. Nevertheless, our lassoes soon reached it, and it had to undergo the same treatment as mine. Mikhal proved to be a remarkable rider with a lightness and ability that immediately won my envy and respect.

We rode back to the inn on our new mounts, and there was no more sign of Mikhal's shyness or uneasiness. As he chattered gaily all the way, I realized with great pleasure and satisfaction that in him I had found a good companion and probably a real friend. At the gate of the inn we were met by Gastan, who was incensed at us for going after the horses without him.

" How should I have ever looked into your

father's face, if something had happened to you ? " he said to me.

Knowing well that the best way to calm him was to make no answer when he scolded, I stood silent with my eyes lowered and waited for him to cool down. After grumbling for another five minutes, he added :

" At least, I hope you have chosen good horses. Let us have a look at them."

He fully approved of our animals and at once ordered one of our Kirghizi to go and bring him a strong, trained mount ; for, as he observed, it was foolish tiring oneself out on a wild one, when one had to look after four hundred horses, six herdsmen and two dare-devils in the bargain. He gave orders that all should be ready to start in the morning at four o'clock, as we had to make over one hundred miles in two days.

The sun was just scattering its morning colours over the steppes, as we drove the herd over the narrow bridge across the Ural River. It proved a difficult task to take the animals through the town and keep them together

in the frightening and distracting surroundings ; but we finally succeeded in bringing them safely out into the steppes again, where we had no impediment to the first village, that lay fifty miles away.

We were all in high spirits save Gastan, for whom the Kirghiz had selected an ambler with the thought that it would please him. But Gastan was in a fury, as the Cossacks always consider it a disgrace for a man to ride a pacer, leaving this for women and children. Still, it was too late to change now, for we had to keep going steadily in order to be on time for our rendezvous the following day.

After Gastan's fury passed, everything went along smoothly, so that by evening we had covered the distance of fifty miles to the first settlement and stopped for the night on the bank of the river Sakmara, a tributary of the Ural. Across the stream was the large village of Nikolskoye, counting about five or six hundred houses and located on our estate.

After a substantial meal at daybreak we immediately set about the problem of getting

our herd across the river. As the single ferry-boat could transport no more than twenty horses at a time, it was impossible to consider it as a means for moving our big herd of four hundred wild animals, and we consequently had no option but to attempt to swim the band across. The stream was not very wide but, on the other hand, was deep and swift.

Though at first we tried every means of forcing the horses into the water, go they would not. Then, remembering the character of the animal I was riding, I cried out to the others :

" Stop shouting and whipping and give us a chance ! "

With that I rode round the drove to the water's edge . . . and my black prince of the herd jumped straight into the current without whipping or forcing. I was really not prepared for his prompt obedience to my rein and heels, so that the sudden cold plunge caught me unawares and took my breath for a second, for we had dropped into a deep hole, where the horse's head went clear

under and mine barely escaped. By the time I had recovered my senses and looked back, I saw the first of the herd already swimming after their leader and all the others following him into the stream. Gastan and Mikhal were standing and watching, while the last of the drove took the water and the herdsmen were swimming across on both flanks of the wild mass. I had already reached the further side before Gastan and Mikhal had the last ones down the bank.

When these were away, Gastan began urging his horse to follow the others. It turned out, however, to be a stubborn animal and only put its head down to nose the water that it would not enter. First Gastan whipped it himself with no result ; then he told Mikhal to slash it from behind, while he plied its sides.

As I was having a good laugh at them from my side of the river, the animal suddenly leaped into the water ; but, instead of swimming steadily forward, it made a series of wild bounds, carrying its head nearly or quite under the water at each jump. When

they came to the middle of the stream, there was a short stretch where Gastan had also to dive every time with his mount. I laughed until my sides ached. Then, when they reached the shallower water and Gastan finished his diving exhibition, I could not resist shouting to him, in spite of the rage he was in :

" Did you see many fish down there, where you've just been exploring ? "

As he came dripping up the bank, his answer was a savage look with a no less savage explosion at me :

" What the devil are you joking about ? This accursed beast can't swim and ought to have the brains blown right out of its head, for it is a disgrace to the whole drove to have such stuff in it ! "

With this pronouncement he dismounted and ordered the herdsmen to catch him any other animal they chose to.

" Anybody who wishes can take this jade. I shall never come near it again ! " he grumbled.

As soon as a horse was ready for him, we

started for our farm at the edge of the village to change our wet clothes, while the herd was driven into a large corral, or *zagon*. It was finally past six o'clock before we could make our real start, so that we pushed the herd along rapidly to keep our appointment at noon some twenty miles away.

It was just after twelve when we spied the mounted figures of my father and brother, together with the first and second stewards, on a hillock ahead. Gastan galloped on in front to make a report to father of all the incidents of the journey. Feeling sure that he might need a prompter for one of the scenes of the morning, I asked, as I rode up, whether he had recounted the attempts of his ambler to feed him to the crow-fish in the stream. Not expecting this, he turned on me with a confused smile and said :

" Ah, you are always where you are not wanted, you young rascal ! "

Nevertheless, my father insisted on the story, and everybody had a hearty laugh at Gastan's expense.

As I had ridden up to my father to greet him, he had immediately looked at my mount and asked :

" Where did you find this lovely animal ? "

" I caught it from the drove while we were in Orenburg," I answered with much pride, as everybody was admiring it.

" Well, you may keep it for yourself, if you like, as a reward for helping to bring in the horses ! "

I was delighted beyond words, as it was the finest animal I had ever ridden, on all the counts of disposition, gait and speed.

As the horses had to be divided at this farm and sent in smaller groups to the other units, the herdsmen were ordered to assemble the animals in a special enclosure, or *kalda*, with a continuous shed along all four sides of the rectangle. After dinner and a short rest, our first duty was to select some forty or fifty animals to go to our manor for personal use and for agricultural work. To catch a horse in the *kalda* one had to use the *kriutchok* (*urga*). While we were all standing

GASTAN TEACHING THE WHITE DEVIL AND MIKHAL THE ART OF COSSACK HORSEMANSHIP

in a group examining and choosing the animals, my father pointed out one, over whose head the Kirghiz succeeded in slipping the noose but let go the pole, as the horse gave a tremendous jerk that carried him toward the centre of the herd. With his jangling stick flying wild, the animal frightened all the others and started a stampede that sent them in mad flight around the enclosure.

In the mêlée, as the horse with the *urga* swung out to the edge of the circle and passed close to us, Gastan rushed in to catch the pole. In a flash we heard a dull thud and saw Gastan land on the ground only some ten feet away from us. When we rushed to him, his face was blue and covered with blood and he made an attempt to rise, but suddenly caught his head in both hands and fell back with a groan. As we lifted him up and helped him into the house, blood was streaming from his mouth and he was unable to speak.

The assistant surgeon was immediately summoned and, on examining the poor man,

found that his jaw was broken and four teeth dislodged—all this with the doctor and the hospital at our manor thirty miles away, whither Gastan, in atrocious pain, had to be driven before he could receive real help and be put to bed. My heart ached so for him that I told my father I could not remain with the horses any longer but that I wanted to ride home beside him to be of any possible help.

Gastan and the assistant surgeon were put into a small, uncomfortable *tarantas* as the only vehicle available and all the way, though it was hot and dusty and the road frightfully rough, the wonderful man sat bolt upright and never uttered a sound. When, after more than four hours, we arrived at the hospital and he was led into the operating room, he could not bear the nervous strain any longer and fainted. Deeply depressed, I left him in care of the doctor and went home. The next day my father arrived with the rest of the party and naturally went straight to the hospital to find our Cossack splendidly holding his own.

CHAPTER VI

THE HORSE-THIEVES

MEANTIME, while we had been away, rumours of new thefts of horses began to circulate. I was told that a party of escaped prisoners from Siberia were sheltering in the forests of the neighbourhood and were committing murders and robberies, setting fire to buildings and stealing horses. Under these conditions my father decided that it would be better for some one of the household always to be up at night, suggesting that we establish three-hour watches, so as not to impose on any one person the necessity of losing all his sleep.

One morning, while my father was away in town on some business, I was wakened at about four o'clock by the second steward, Shimon, who was also a Cossack and Gastan's

brother-in-law. He was very excited and reported to me that in one of the buildings of the manor a shop had been robbed in the night and that the man who slept in the next room had not heard the robbers breaking the locks on the door.

"I cannot understand these people," he said with indignation. "When they are asleep, they are like logs of wood. You could fire a cannon across their beds, and they would never hear it! If anybody should ever just scratch at my shutters, I should be up in an instant!"

"I must have a look into this man's boast," I thought to myself and found a plan already br. .ing in my head. I told him to inform the police, as it was their affair to make the investigation and catch the thief.

As soon as I was up, I searched out Mikhal.

"Look here," I began, "you have heard of the robbery? Well, Shimon was boasting to me that he sleeps so lightly it would be impossible to rob him. I propose that you and I take it on to-night. Do you agree?"

"I certainly do and with great pleasure," answered Mikhal with a laugh. "It will be a treat to see his face and hear his excuses in the morning!"

Knowing Shimon had a revolver, and not wishing to receive a bullet, if things went wrong in our little expedition, I decided we must lift it beforehand in some way or other.

On the trail of his arsenal, we rode up to his house in the afternoon and asked him if he would give us some tea. When we were all at table, I began talking to him about the robberies and told him that I was thinking of buying a revolver. Fond of boasting, the fellow immediately went to fetch his own pistol and began praising its unusual qualities, although it was simply an ordinary type.

I turned it over in my hands and admired it for a long time.

"Could you lend it to me for a while?" I asked. "The chief steward is going to town to-morrow, and I should like to show him this, so that he could buy me one of the same make."

"Certainly, take it and rest assured that you will be thoroughly pleased when you have its mate, for it is a wonderful weapon."

We finished our tea, thanked our host and went off in high glee over the ease with which we had disarmed the enemy. Back at the house, I locked the revolver in my desk and set about preparing everything we should need—a screw-driver, a chisel, a bag, a diamond for cutting glass and a tin of honey with a piece of rag. At midnight we quietly slipped out of our rooms and, keeping in the shadows of the buildings as much as we could to avoid the watchman, crept gently and noiselessly toward Shimon's house. As the moon was full, our task of avoiding detection was not easy; but we finally accomplished this and reached the kitchen window which we had chosen as the point of attack.

For a first operation I unscrewed and took off the shutters and, as the window was locked on the inside so that it could not be pried open without the risk of too much noise, I made a circle on the glass with my

diamond, soaked my rag in the honey, put it against the glass and pressed gently on the lower part of the circle. The glass finally gave way where it was cut and stuck to the honey long enough to allow me to catch one edge and draw the piece out through my irregular opening. Then I reached in through the hole and unlocked the window.

"You remain here with the bag and keep a sharp eye all around you," I whispered to Mikhal, "while I go in and pass you out everything I can find inside."

In less than fifteen minutes the kitchen was nearly empty with the provisions and crockery safe in the bag. After climbing out, I locked the window in the same way I had opened it and screwed on the shutters. Then we found our real difficulty was to keep from laughing at our thought of Shimon's discomfiture the next day.

It was again at about four o'clock when I was roused with a sudden start, for Shimon did not come in, but flew in like a bomb.

"There is some mystery in it, because no

living man could have done it! Everything is gone. What shall I do now? Oh, it is terrible! It is . . . !" and he began cursing and swearing. He was deadly pale, and his eyes looked as if they were going to jump out of his head.

"Wait a bit," I urged, to stop the torrent of words that came streaming from his mouth, "what is it all about? Calm yourself and then explain what has happened."

Just then Mikhal appeared on the threshold, biting his lips to keep from going into fits of laughter.

"Mark you, I was nearly murdered this night," Shimon began.

"What! What are you saying?"

"Yes, this is what happened," he went on. "This morning, when I went into my kitchen, I found it empty, completely empty —no crockery, no provisions, and even my old samovar, that belonged to my father, had disappeared. In the window I found a round hole and nothing more. It must have been some ghost that did it, for the

shutters were hooked from the inside and the doors were locked."

"This astonishes me," I exclaimed, "and especially that, of all people, such a thing should have happened to you; for you said only yesterday that your sleep is so light that you could hear the slightest rustle in a room near by. And then I don't quite see why the robbery of your kitchen worked such great danger to your life."

"Oh, but once somebody was in the kitchen, it was not difficult for him—or for 'it'—to enter my bedroom and split my skull with a hatchet."

This was too much for us. We could not keep back our laughter any longer and simply rolled with it for a time. At first the fellow looked at us in astonishment, probably thinking that we had gone mad; but then he flew into a rage and ran out of the room, slamming the door behind him. We caught him in the garden but had considerable difficulty in making him listen to us.

"Look here," I said, "if you want to get

all your stolen things back, come along with me."

"You are again poking fun at me!" he answered with a fierce look. "It is mean of you to do so, when I have lost so much!"

"Nobody is making fun of you. Just come and see for yourself," put in Mikhal.

We led him down into the cellar and showed him the bag with his belongings.

"There you are! You can take them and remember never to boast again about the lightness of your sleep."

He looked into the bag and would not believe his eyes.

"Oh Lord, where did you find all this? Who is the robber? Let me have him. I shall break his head if only I get at him! I shall teach him how to rob Shimon!" he exclaimed.

"Now don't you start boasting again! The robbers are in front of you. It was Mikhal and I who robbed you last night, just to teach you a lesson not to brag, and

this was the reason we borrowed your revolver yesterday afternoon."

He was so confused over the revelation that he could do nothing but silently pick up the bag and hurry off home to tell the good news to his wife.

It was Mikhal's unfailing enthusiasm for escapades of this kind, as well as for all our sports and riding, that made me grow very fond of him and look upon him as the best comrade I had ever had. We became more and more attached to each other with every new adventure.

It was just at this time that I unfolded to him my new plan of capturing the horse-thieves, over which he went fairly mad with anticipation. The country police was doing its best to find the culprits and recover the horses ; but the police in our eastern provinces, where the population is sparse, is very inefficient. For every ten to twelve villages there is only a single patrol, so that, with the settlements often from ten to fifteen miles apart, one can easily understand that these

could not do much, even though they were mounted.

Owing to my constant riding, I knew the country almost as well as our own house. Hardly a wood road or a path was a stranger to me, and there was one spot which I often thought would make a beautiful hiding-place. This was a small clearing in a valley set right in the midst of a forest that was almost impassable, unless one knew the trails through the underbush. It was called the "cholera hole," probably because it was the place in former times where people who had died of cholera were buried; and nobody liked to go there for the additional reason that it was looked upon by every one as haunted. I felt sure that the police had never visited it.

I knew of a trail that led to it. It was badly overgrown, but one could still make one's way along it. I do not know why, but I felt sure that the horse-thieves were in some way or other connected with the spot. In any event it was the best moment for us to

have a try at the thing, while father was in town and Gastan, although out of hospital, still wore a bandage over his face and could not go about with us.

So one day, when we heard that horses were again missing from our drove and that five others had disappeared from a neighbouring village, we decided to set off without delay for our reconnaissance. We told Gastan we were going out hunting *berkut*, or vultures, generally found on one of the hills near the cholera hole. We took our rifles and rode quietly off. This place, where I hoped to find some definite clue to the robberies, lay some ten miles distant from our house. On approaching the wood, we loaded our rifles and silently entered the mouth of the trail. We moved with the greatest caution, halting every fifty paces or so to look round and listen. Our mounts, as though they understood what we were doing, seemed to step very gingerly and stood perfectly still, when we pulled them up.

After making about two miles in this

way through the thicket, we again stopped to listen and suddenly heard something resembling smothered snorting. We were advancing with our rifles ready to shoot when Mikhal, who was in the lead, lifted his hand and stopped. Through the trees we could see the clearing and several horses lying in the trampled grass with rags tied round their muzzles. It seemed strange that there was nobody there to watch them, a fact which challenged our caution at once, so that we kept our rifles all ready for immediate use as we slowly emerged into the open.

We had no more than showed ourselves before the exaggeratedly still forest was rent with a shot, as the sing of a bullet passed our heads. Two men jumped from behind some bushes we were approaching, one with a strange weapon that looked like a pistol with four barrels and the other with a heavy club. As I fired at the man with the gun, his right arm dropped, the weapon fell to the ground and he caught hold of his shoulder with his left hand.

"Up with your hands, both of you," I ordered, as we covered them with our rifles.

Then, while Mikhal kept his weapon on them, I dismounted, took my lasso from my saddle and roped them both with their hands behind their backs.

Next I examined the shoulder of the man I had hit and, finding he had only a flesh wound, bandaged it with my handkerchief and asked Mikhal to keep an eye on the prisoners, while I went to unfasten the horses. All of these had their four legs hobbled and their noses tied with cloths, so that their whinnies or snorts could not be heard. We had evidently struck a temporary depôt of the gang, with only two of their number left on guard. Now the problem was to get the men and the horses to the police-station, which was at least four miles away. Finally we put both prisoners, with their hands still tied behind their backs, on one of the stolen horses which Mikhal kept beside his own mount with a simple noose round its neck ; while I brought up the rear with

the remaining animals herded between us.

The pistol with which one of the robbers fired at us proved to be an ancient weapon with four brass barrels, which turned after each shot, bringing the next barrel into position under the firing-pin.

At the police-station we handed the prisoners and horses over to the officials and made a report on our expedition. Through the information received from these two the whole gang was afterwards caught, and it turned out, to our astonishment and dismay, that the principal thieves were our own herdsmen.

After making our statement to the police, we mounted our horses and started home in high spirits over our day's hunt. It was already growing dusk when we met two of our grooms, who exclaimed :

" Thank God you are safe ! Everybody is terribly anxious about you, and Gastan ordered us all out to search the country. He, strangely enough, has the idea that you went off to hunt for the horse-thieves ! "

I was quite astonished at this and racked my brains, as we galloped along, with wondering how Gastan could ever have found out what we were up to. When he met us at the stable gate, he asked in a voice which showed clearly that he was holding back his temper :

" Where have you been ? "

" We went *berkut* shooting, as we told you. When we were trying to approach as near as possible to the place where they generally roost, we pushed through the thicket and came upon the stolen horses and two horse-thieves, whom we captured and took to the police-station," I answered quietly.

" Now you are telling a pure lie. Why, if you were going to shoot vultures, did you take those rifles you have slung over your backs instead of your ordinary shotguns ? "

We saw that we had no way out of it except to tell the whole truth of the matter. Gastan listened to the end without interruption ; and, when we finished, he said :

" Well, you have done very well in one way,

I mean in your success in capturing the thieves and the stolen horses ; but, as you have done it without permission and have told a lie, your horses and guns are going to have a rest until your father returns from town."

We had nothing to reply and, with confused feelings but with hearts overflowing with boyish pride in what we had done, we went back to the house for a glorious meal.

In these and many other excursions Mikhal was always my trusted confederate and shared with me all the joys and griefs and thrills of that wonderful life of the plains, a companionship that made him very dear to me. It would fill volumes, if I tried to put down in writing all the extraordinary things that happened to us until, by the will of Fate, we were separated for years and only met on foreign soil after the disaster of our country and the entire change of our personal estate.

When my brother finished the Pages' School and was given his commission as an

officer, Mikhal went with him as his personal servant.

During those boyhood days of ours in the country there were many friends of Gastan who, from time to time, stopped by to visit him, just as there were also many Tartars, Lesghians, Circassians and other tribesmen of the Caucasus who came to our place in connection with some business matters of my father or just out of the feeling of friendship which all the Mohammedans felt for our family, after the services which my grandfather had rendered them.

For all of these visitors who came to our country house my grandfather's arms collection held a very great interest. Though it was far from a large or formal display, it contained some unique and very interesting pieces, a great many of which had been turned out of the soil by the ploughs of the peasants. Among these there were arquebuses, spears, bows and arrows, maces, chainmail, helmets and shields, some of which dated from the days when Yermack conquered Siberia in the

middle of the sixteenth century. Others evidently belonged to the forces of the impostor Pugacheff, a Cossack of the Yaik—now the Urals—who led a rebellion against the Empress Catharine the Great at the end of the eighteenth century. The collection moreover boasted a small battery of artillery in the shape of nine old cast-iron cannons, marked with the year 1743 and also unearthed on our lands ; a gun, all inlaid with gold, which had been found at the bottom of a lake ; a pistol with four brass barrels and a sword that had belonged to the Hungarian leader, General Kozinchi.

But the weapon I always liked the most and the one that was the object of admiration and even of worship—if one might go so far—for all the Caucasians was the beautiful sword of Shamyl, that romantic character who stood out for all of them not only as a national hero but as a Holy Saint ; for, during the days of his power in the Caucasus, he was the spiritual head, or Imam, of the Mohammedan faith in that part of the world.

The Cossacks used often to tell me that, if ever I went to war, I must take this weapon with me, for it would be a safe and sure talisman to defend me and bring me through. Young Mikhal was always dreaming and talking of war, picturing us both in events of fantastic bravery and urging me never to set out on any campaign or any great martial enterprise without the magic sword of Shamyl at my side.

After he went away as my brother's servant, we never saw each other again before I heard from my brother that Mikhal had left him. From then on we lost track of him for a time, as he did not return to the Caucasus and even old Gastan had no word of his whereabouts. A year or two later I learned that he had been unwilling to go into service as an ordinary Cossack soldier and wanted to become an officer. For this purpose, we were told, he had found himself work that would give him support and leave him the necessary free time in which to study and fit himself for the higher rank. It seemed that his determination

to succeed, and this without accepting aid from his old mother, kept him away from home and steadily at work to reach his goal. As time went on, I often inquired about him and always heard that he was making fine progress, but somehow it happened that during a long period of eight years I saw him only twice and then for merely a passing word or two.

Then came the War, and I completely lost touch with my boyhood friend. In that great upheaval of the Red terror and the disorganization which followed I never knew whether he was alive or dead, whether he had remained in Russia or had managed to escape from the net that dragged from the sea of life so many of the loyal Cossacks. Unable to find anyone who could give me news of him, I at last took to advertising in such papers as reached farthest into the Russian world ; but always without avail, so that I had practically given up hope of ever finding or seeing him again.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER THE RED TERROR

ONE day, when I was in Constantinople just after the evacuation of General Wrangel's army from the Crimea, a Cossack officer stepped up to me, as I was entering the Russian Embassy, saluted and, coming closer, asked :

" Don't you recognize me, Major ? "

It was some seconds, even after his question, before I realized that this worn, emaciated face was that of the ruddy Cossack boy with whom I had romped over the steppes. It was a wonderful meeting, full of the joy of seeing one given up for lost, yet tinged with that sting of suffering which one of my questions soon unveiled.

" Yes, Major, I am also longing to have a chat with you ; but first I must somehow find

a room where I can wash and spruce up a bit. I have already been here for three days and have no place to live, no money, no change of clothes and for the past forty-eight hours have hardly eaten anything."

"That's easily settled," I answered; "for we have an extra room in our place and you are coming right along to join us and to tell us everything that has happened to you since we parted."

His was a simple story, full of tragedy, but only such a one as thousands of others had lived and consequently crushingly familiar to us. At the outbreak of the Revolution he was at the German front with the Caucasian division, the one that was ordered to Petrograd to suppress the revolt in the capital and which never reached its destination, owing to the breakdown of the railways through the damning administration of Rodzianko, Gutchkoff and their ilk. After the abortive journey to the north the division was sent back into the line, where there was no more fighting. The Cossacks were furious at this breakdown

of transportation, for they felt confident that, once in Petrograd, they would have been able to put an end to the mutiny and to have prevented a revolution. It was this same belief in the minds of the leaders of the movement that prompted them to cause the destruction of sections of the railway and thus prevent the further progress of the Cossacks.

Then in June, 1917, the Caucasian division took part in that ridiculous assault near Tarnopol led by Kerensky, an assault which could not possibly have had other than a disastrous result with an army already demoralized and with most of its officers murdered or dismissed. After that senseless attack the Germans easily dispersed the straggling remnants of what was once the Russian army and marched rapidly forward without meeting any resistance from a horde of deserters, who were fleeing for their homes and were more occupied with robbing their own countrymen than with defending their native land from its on-marching enemy.

In these same weeks there began in south

Russia the concentration of officers who had succeeded in escaping from the murderous hands of the soldiers, which took shape in Novocherkarsk in the organization of the first units of the Volunteer army.

Mikhal, who was nearly shot by the soldiers, managed finally to escape and determined to make his way through to these headquarters. It was with great difficulty and after encountering untold dangers that he finally arrived at his destination. I never did succeed in drawing from him anything like a full account of his journey with all of its attendant perils and sufferings, because he would always avoid it with some such statement as :

" It isn't worth talking about. I only went through what thousands of others did, and there was nothing particularly unique in my experience."

At various times I did, however, worm out of him that he was once wounded by the Bolsheviks, fell ill with typhus and, as a result of his sickness, was nearly captured, only being saved by some Cossack women, who

hid him for ten days in a hole in the earth behind some bags of potatoes. After recovering from his illness through the sheer brute force of his constitution, he finally managed to join the Volunteer army and fought with them until the end came, which brought him to Constantinople and back into my own life.

Following a rest of a few days Mikhal declared that he could not go on living at my expense and that he must at once set about finding some work. As he spoke Turkish fluently, he soon secured a post as an interpreter in the Allied Police Control. Everything seemed to be going well with him, when one morning he came and announced to me abruptly :

" I am dreadfully homesick and anxious about my mother, for I have not seen her these many years and for the past twelvemonth have not even had a word from her. I am going to try to get home through Batum, see how matters are going with her and then come back."

Though I pointed out to him the dangers and difficulties he would have to face, he was quite determined and was away in a few days. It was a reckless hazard he was taking, as I warned him when he was preparing for his journey, and I had not too much hope of ever seeing him return.

This was in the spring of 1921, just a little while before we finally left the Black Sea region for France. Here in the more normal surroundings of Western Europe I very often found myself musing over Mikhal's perilous journey in the Red territory and wondering whether he was still alive or whether he had paid the price of torture and death for his desire to go and search out his mother and his home. As time went on and the first months of no news from him stretched out to more than a year, I came to think of him as but one of those many, many intimate souls, either relatives or friends, who had been drawn down in the terrible whirlpool of passion that had sucked under the best lives of our land.

You who have not seen these members of your own family, these relatives and friends crushed and slain in the wild hours of a national insanity, have but little means of measuring my inexpressible joy when, out of the clear blue sky of complete isolation, there suddenly came to me a bolt of news of him some two years and a half after I had bid him a doubting God-speed on the pier at Constantinople.

It was in October of 1923 when the little French postman, with his stereotyped air of the ordinary, handed me a letter from America, the handwriting on which burned its way like an electric current to my heart. Already, before I could tear the cover and come to the text, a thousand questions were hammering at my brain. But, most of all, Mikhal was alive, though how could he ever have leapt from the Caucasus to the United States? Then I read in his own words that he was safe in America, but I stumbled over his next sentence and wondered what it all really meant; for there in indubitable script

stood the statement that he had with him my sword, the sword of Shamyl! I simply could not believe my eyes, when I read this. Was he jesting with me or what? I knew that he had gone to the Caucasus and from the postmark and all the other outward signs of his letter I accepted the fact that he was now in America; but how could he ever have picked up my sword, when this was taken away from me more than five years before in Orenburg, fifteen hundred miles to the north of his little village beneath the towering snows of Kazbek?

Immediately I wrote to beg of him a full account of his journey and the story of how and where he stumbled upon my sword. Time's hour-glass seemed to have clogged, as I waited for his word; and often in my little basement carpenter shop I found my plane had stopped and must have been still some minutes before I woke to the fact that I had been dreaming over Mikhal and the green-carpeted slopes of his native mountains. In answer to my letter he sent me the following

facts, again giving an aggravatingly meagre sketch of his own personal experiences during his far-from-ordinary expedition.

After our parting at Constantinople he made a safe journey to Batum on board an Italian steamer ; but, the moment he set foot on shore in that port, he was arrested and put in prison by the Georgian Bolsheviks, being held there for three days, while they tried to prove that he was a spy of the Whites. In the end he succeeded in deceiving them with his story that he was a runaway prisoner from the White army, by whom he had been captured not long before the evacuation of the Crimea, and that he was now trying to reach his home in the north of the Caucasus. The Bolsheviks released him on the condition that he should not leave Batum, and forced him to serve in one of their regiments.

For nearly two months he quietly took his duty with the troops, ever watching for an opportunity to make his escape. At last his chance came one night when he was assigned to sentry duty at one of the northern outposts

of the town, where he walked his beat until the midnight patrol passed and then slipped quietly away, keeping in the forest along the shore until he was well beyond reach of pursuit. His first three days passed fairly well, as he did not meet anyone and was able to secure food not only from shooting some game with his soldier's rifle but also from the ample supplies of fruit with which the country abounds.

The fourth night was not so quiet, for he was wakened in the early hours of the morning by crashing sounds, that sent him scurrying up a tree. He was just in time to avoid rough treatment from a herd of wild boar that charged over the place where he had been lying. That same day he fell in with some natives who were travelling to the north and carried on with them for three more days. As their paths separated, he was again left alone in the vast forest but this time with a very greatly improved commissariat, in that they had supplied him with salt, sugar, tea and matches.

As he journeyed on, he was awakened one morning by the rattle of rifle shots. After listening and pondering for a moment, he decided to scout out the engagement and proceeded cautiously toward the sound of the firing. He could not make out what it was all about, inasmuch as the shooting was so constant that it had, for his trained ear, the unmistakable sound of a real engagement. Moving stealthily through the brush and stopping to reconnoitre after every few seconds, he finally crawled up on a party of four men who were cooking round a camp fire. As the sound of the shots came from some distance farther on, Mikhal approached them, asked who they were and demanded what the firing meant.

They told him it was an encounter between their own associates, the Greens, and some of the Reds. Mikhal knew that these Greens were made up of deserters from both the Red and the White armies, who roamed the forests and existed by robbery, falling and preying upon White and Red detachments alike,

whenever they could capture any supplies thereby, and also harassing the population. Anyone who had no settled vocation and no handicapping principles as to the methods of acquiring a living could join them without difficulty, for neither identification papers nor a certificated past were required.

After a short deliberation Mikhal decided to throw in his lot with them, for he learned from the men at the fire that they were working northward toward Vladikavkas, where they hoped to corral a rich booty, and he figured that it would be easier as a member of their gang to evade or push through the many Red patrols which were scouring the country. Their objective was also situated in the plain not far from Mikhal's home, so that he would have but a short distance to go after leaving them.

As it turned out, Mikhal miscalculated seriously, for he was compelled to remain with them more than two months, instead of going through in a fortnight or so as he should have done. Moreover, in one of the fights he

was slightly wounded and, following this, ran a high fever, so that he was laid up for a long time in far-from-ideal surroundings. In the meantime the Greens were pushed back by the Reds and had to swing off and break through an entirely new route.

At last they fought their way over the mountains to a point where it was practicable for Mikhal to slip off and head out alone for his native *stanitza*, or Cossack village. It is difficult to indicate what the feelings and the emotions must have been in the breast of this officer-robber as he approached the little settlement where his mother lived and where he had passed all the years of his childhood before he came to ride with us on the steppes below the Urals. Although he was naturally anxious to see his old mother as soon as possible, he could not risk going into the *stanitza* by daylight, for he knew that it was occupied by the Bolsheviks. So he hid for a long time among the bamboos that lined the bank of the Terek River, in the hope that some of the Cossack women or children

would come down for water and give him an opportunity to question them.

Finally a young woman did come out to wash some linen. When Mikhal crawled down near enough to call to her, she was terribly frightened, for it still happens that many young women are kidnapped in the Caucasus by raiding mountaineers. But when he gave his name, she lost her fear, came up to him and soon recognized him, in spite of all the years that he had been away.

She informed him that there was a Commissar in the *stanitza* who had been appointed by the Bolsheviks from among the Cossacks, but that the man was certainly not a Bolshevik himself, though he had to pretend to be in order to prevent the Reds from sending some outside enthusiast, who would make the life of the village miserable. Every few days there rode over from the headquarters of the neighbouring large *stanitza* a senior Commissar to see that all was going well and that there was no counter-revolution or treachery a-brewing. The woman added that, if the

MIKHAL STUMBLES UPON THE CAMP OF THE GREENS

Cossack Commissar were warned, there would be no danger for Mikhal to go home during the night.

Then she hurried back to the village to carry the throbbing news to Mikhal's mother, while the returning son lay restless among the bamboos, waiting for the lingering night to come. Shortly afterward his cousin, a lad of about fifteen, came out to the river bank to see him. It was crushing for Mikhal to listen to his tale of all that had happened in the village since the Revolution.

Several times the Reds vainly attacked the *stanitza*, for all the Cossacks, old men and boys alike, fought so desperately in defence of their homes and their women that the Bolsheviks could not break through. At last, however, the enemy brought up artillery in such force that the Cossacks saw it was hopeless to try to hold out against them. Yet, in spite of the staggering certainty, they all stayed in the line and fought, preferring to go out that way rather than surrender and witness the desecration of their ancestral homes.

And thus it came about that nearly all the Cossack men and boys were killed or wounded, the *stanitza* occupied, the houses robbed of everything and all the horses and cattle driven away.

In this last fight nearly all of Mikhal's relatives had fallen, among them his Uncle Gastan, the one who had brought us up and had lived in our household for more than seventeen years. When the news of this man's death reached me here in France, it was a very hard blow for me. My mind was flooded with the memories of all the warmth of his friendship, of the support and encouragement he had given me during some of the hard days of my life. In the midst of them I recalled that it was in his arms my father died nearly twenty years ago. It was he who constantly urged upon us courage and all the manly features of character, and I feel that it is to him I owe the qualities and the training that may have made it possible for me to persist through these past incredible years and to have earned from my enemies the

sobriquet which my dealings with them in the Black Sea region brought to me. Never shall I forget Gastan, nor shall the years rob me of any of my love or gratitude for him.

When nightfall finally came, Mikhal entered the *stanitza* as carefully and stealthily as possible. It was a sorrow-laden story that the mother told her son after the first moments of joy at their meeting—everything destroyed, everybody robbed, people treated worse than slaves. To Mikhal's inquiries for his friends and relatives the only answers he received were :

"Killed. . . . Shot. . . . Disappeared. . . . Taken away by the Bolsheviks, nobody knows where. . . ."

Some of the families had been bodily transported to the north of Russia and all their property destroyed.

That same night Mikhal saw the Cossack Commissar and learned from him that he must choose one of two courses. He must either invent some story that would enable him to present himself to the Head Com-

missar, or he must hide during the days and only come into the *stanitza* in secret during the night. In the first instance he risked being enlisted in the Red army and sent away to some town in Russia proper, while in the second he faced the certain fate of being shot as a spy, if he were discovered in his hiding-place or in the village.

Mikhal decided to take the chances of the former course and went to see the Head Commissar, when he came to the village the following morning. He told him that he had fought against Denikin with the Reds, after which he had been sent with a detachment against the Greens in the Caucasus, where he had been wounded and captured and held prisoner for a long time, until finally he managed to escape and came home, exhausted and ill. He asked of the Commissar permission to remain quietly at home for a month to recuperate and make himself fit for future service.

The Commissar received his story rather incredulously and began plying him with

detailed questions concerning the Greens. As the Bolsheviks were thoroughly informed about these bands through their comprehensive spy system, even knowing the names of most of the leaders, the Commissar put some sharp questions with which he hoped to trap Mikhal ; but, as the latter was equally well-informed through his two months' association with the bandits, he withstood the examination successfully and received the Commissar's permission to remain in the *stanitza*, on condition that he would not leave without this official's written permission.

Through the latter part of this catechizing Mikhal found himself absent-mindedly staring at the side arms of the Commissar. At last he could not take his eyes off the Bolshevik's sword and was racking his brain to try to recall where he had seen the unusual blade before, wondering all the time why it seemed to hold such a strange fascination for him. This gaze of Mikhal's attracted the attention of the Commissar and drew from him the rather sharp question :

"Why are you staring so at my sword?"

"Because it is such a beautiful weapon," was Mikhal's commonplace answer, as his heart thumped with the sudden realization that there before him, almost within reach of his hand, was the blade he and Gastan had urged me to carry to the wars, when we should go to serve our Emperor—the historic sword of Shamyl.

"Yes, it is a beauty, and it means a great deal more to me because of the way I happened to come by it; for I took it from a Cossack chief in Orenburg and I am proud of it, as he was no easy devil to catch. Even after he was arrested and put to the wall, he managed to escape, Lord only knows how!"

Mikhal's feelings ran high as these words of the Red Commissar burned in the certainty that this was my sword and as he realized that this was the man who had sent me to the wall. Hardly had the officer finished speaking before Mikhal had sworn to himself that he would return that sword to me, though at the

MIKHAL BEFORE THE COMMISSAR

time he formulated no plan but left everything to the hand of Chance.

When the Red official had gone, Mikhal asked the Cossack Commissar the name of his superior.

"Tikhon Popoff, the well-known ex-Commissar of Military Affairs in Orenburg," was the answer which stirred Mikhal somewhat but nothing as it affected me, when I read this statement in his letter. What memories flooded my mind, as I was transported back with such realism as almost to suffer over again the unnerving experiences of that last night in Orenburg, of that first meeting with the man whom I had been chasing for weeks only to have him turn hound at the last moment and hand over my pelt to be disposed of by his underlings. I recalled too with equal vividness the chance meeting in the railway station, when I had to sit opposite him with only a newspaper between my face and a pair of eyes that would have effectually sealed my destiny, if they had once again rested upon me.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RECOVERY OF THE SWORD

OFTEN in my life has Fortune spread her kindly mantle over me, but never in my wildest dreams would I have believed that such a coincidence as this could have actually come to pass. There was Popoff at a post over fifteen hundred miles from where we had enacted our dramatic scene in the second story of the caravanserai, and before him appeared for investigation a disguised Cossack officer, who had travelled many more hundreds of miles to visit his aged mother, who was one of the very few men in all of Russia that could have recognized my treasured sword and who was the single individual, once his Uncle Gastan had fallen, that would have risked his life to try to bring it back to me.

After this first meeting with the Commissar Mikhal remained quietly at home, depressed by his surroundings and immersed in schemes for carrying out his resolve. The life of their household was an unending torture to him, for he saw ever before him the lack of food and of all the means with which to secure it. Moreover, he felt that he was constantly spied upon and that his old mother would really be safer and more at peace in her mind, if she could think of him as beyond the possible clutches of the Reds, who had taken all her other men-folk from her. After about three weeks of such torture, he decided to leave, for in no case would he really join the Red army, unless it were simply to serve his desperate ends.

Having taken leave of all his people, he went to the Bolshevik headquarters at the neighbouring towns and reported to Popoff that he felt much better and was consequently ready to go wherever the latter might order him ; but requested at the same time that he be allowed to remain a few days at head-

quarters to learn what changes had taken place in the Red army and in the administration, asking Popoff himself to instruct him. The Commissar sent him to one of the barracks, where a young officer was directed to post him on everything that was going on in the army.

At headquarters these Communists usually spent their evenings in drinking, singing and gambling. On the second evening of his stay Mikhal was invited by Popoff to take part in their revel. He went and apparently threw himself whole-heartedly into the carousal, though his mind was never for a moment free from the search for a plan to lift the sword.

He came soon to his first decision, which was that, if he should manage to gain possession of it, he would need only a horse to complete his strategy, inasmuch as he knew intimately the countryside between the Terek River and the ports on the Black Sea.

As the evening wore on, the party became ever more intoxicated and boisterous. Mikhal

sat near Popoff and made it his duty to see that the Commissar's glass was never long empty. He followed an old and sure road that, the more his man drank, the greater chance he had of carrying through the details of his plan. As he plied my executioner with wine, he told him how much he liked him, how proud he would be to have service under him and what an honour it would be to become his friend. He praised and flattered him in every way with bald simplicity, in order to insinuate himself as far as he could into the Commissar's good graces.

At last he gained his first trench, for toward midnight Popoff was so helplessly drunk that he begged Mikhal to take him to his room and to sleep on the divan there. Popoff, without undressing, tumbled on the bed and was off in a second. For about an hour and a half Mikhal waited for everything to become quiet, before he stole over to examine his host and see how the land lay.

Finding that the man was dead with stupor, Mikhal drew his knife and carefully cut the

Commissar's belt, so that he could slip off the sword. In his letter he wrote me that for a moment he was on the point of putting his dagger into the drunkard's throat but stayed his hand with the realization that it was cowardly to kill a sleeping man, no matter how much he merited it, and turned away. His next move was to examine carefully the officer's private desk, where he found all sorts of official papers and among them some blank forms for passes. One of these was signed by Popoff, so that he had only to fill in the details in order to have a document that might stand him in very good stead.

Then he went out into the courtyard, opened the stable, selected a horse and saddled it. Just as he was about to mount, a thought struck him which caused him to tie up the animal and go back into Popoff's room. In his own far-from-sober state of mind he became obsessed with the thought of leaving a note of thanks for Popoff; but, remembering that his mother was being left behind and that she might suffer for it, he

contented himself with picking up a revolver and some cartridges.

With all the horsemanship and stealth which a trained Cossack officer could muster, he threaded his way through the town and into the country, where he rode as hard as he could toward the west until he came upon the outposts of day, which sent him to cover until the evening fell. After a week of travel, during the latter part of which he risked riding also in the daylight, he managed to make the port of Sukhum on the Black Sea.

The first evening he was there he succeeded in finding a Turkish boat that was sailing for Constantinople the following night. He sold his horse and, with his command of the Turkish language, had no difficulty in making a bargain for his passage and hid himself away on board until the anchor chains had jangled in. Then, with a tremendous feeling of relief at being beyond the reach of his Red companions, who would have taken a terrible vengeance for the daring sacrilege he had committed, he emerged and breathed

once more the free air of the sea without the momentary fear of being overhauled and carried back.

In four days and a half he reached Constantinople and soon succeeded, through a rather fortunate combination of circumstances, in arranging to go to America. Not having found me in the Turkish capital, he carried my blade with him to the United States, where he learned through mutual friends of my address in France and wrote me the hardly-credible news of all these adventures and of the safety of my lost sword.

After these tales of mountain and plain on the borderland of Europe and Asia, it were perhaps prosaic for the scribe of this record to tell about standing on the kerbstone of a Detroit street in the rain, outside a house labelled with a scarlet fever sign, and waiting for the return from night school of the man who had ridden from that Cossack *stanitza* to the shore of the Black Sea and taken for the second time the sword of Shamyl away from its

native land. But these last details are curious and should, perhaps, go down.

It was in December of 1923, when I happened to be sojourning at Battle Creek, Michigan, that I received a letter from the White Devil, telling me his sword had been found, that it was in the hands of Mikhal —— at a certain address in Detroit and asking me if I would not bring it back to him, when I returned to Europe. He added that I need only send a card to this Cossack officer, for he had " been warned."

After some correspondence with Mikhal, in which I requested him to send the valued weapon by express, covered by an insurance of $5,000, I was finally so worried by the fear of having to leave before the sword arrived that I telegraphed and urged immediate despatch. A day or two later a special delivery package came through the post for me and, on January 17, 1924, just six years and a few hours from the night on which the Commissar, Popoff, ordered the White Devil stripped of his side arms before

his execution, the historic and curiously travelled Moslem blade thus came into my hands to be carried back to its Cossack owner.

I tried unsuccessfully by letter to draw from Mikhal the story of the six years of its life since that night in Orenburg and, bent on learning at least something of the facts and most anxious to meet and chat with Mikhal, I telegraphed him the day I was leaving Battle Creek, asking him to dine that evening in Detroit with me during the two hours I had between trains.

It was pouring torrents when I reached his lodgings and found the house labelled with the quarantine sign. In response to my shouts a head appeared at an upper window and informed me that Mikhal was at night school and that he would be home by nine. Instead of dining I searched out the public school building, found the classes were just breaking up and wasted half an hour in trying to run him down. Then I returned, through rivers of rain, and took post on the kerb outside that far-from-luxurious little house

and waited, pondering over the extraordinary wanderings of this weapon of war, from the Caucasus all over Russia and finally to a rain-driven side street in Detroit.

As my train time approached, I regretfully abandoned my post and learned from Mikhal later that the telegram was delivered to him at two-thirty the following morning.

And thus, perhaps, some small portion of the mass of story that belongs to the sword of Shamyl has been chronicled, or at least suggested ; but it may be that the record is far from closed, for I had this answer from the White Devil in response to my request to be allowed to leave the sword in America for exhibition there :

" Yes, if you wish to ; but on condition that it be returned to me, when I ask for it, for I should never be satisfied to go back into Russia to fight without it."

And here we might well rest, were it not for the fact that, as I have ruminated and marvelled over the inscrutable vagaries of this embodiment of Moslem fanaticism, I

have often found myself dreaming of a band of those wild Chechnian warriors winding down through one of their rugged mountain defiles and making it ring with their exotic

MURID BATTLE CHANT.

Sword of Shamyl
Of lithe Daghestan steel!
Allah-blessed blade,
Bared in crusade,
Bathe thy sleek sides
Where the infidel rides—
Allah-blessed sword of Shamyl!

Down from our mountain-hung Chechnian *aouls*,
Murids, we drop to thy call.
Gunib that breed thee has suckled us too—
Allah will guide us through all!

Stricken Akhulgo shall send thee her souls.
Slain on her altar-rock high;
Chela shall venge them a thousand to one—
Allah still rules in the sky!

Sword of Shamyl
Of lithe Daghestan steel!
Allah-blessed blade,
Bared in crusade,
Bathe thy sleek sides
Where the infidel rides—
Allah-blessed sword of Shamyl!

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The LOST SWORD OF SHAMYL

LEWIS STANTON PALEN

Author of 'The White Devil's Mate'

With illustrations by
Prince Serge Cantacuzene-Speransky

LEWIS STANTON PALEN

harbors an inborn urge for new scenes, new people, and fresh possibilities. After graduating from Cornell University, he went to China during the Boxer Rebellion and took up residence in the temple of the Empress of Heaven in Antung. For a quarter of a century he has kept a finger on the pulse of the Chinese Giant and few Americans have probed more deftly to the throbbing heart of Asia.

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